



Contact: Lou Cafiero, 240-205-0400
Nathan Constable, 301-608-3040 ext.5

For Immediate Release
September 4, 2008

Sanctuary Foundation Funds Projects Designed to Protect Fragile Coral Reefs and Communities in Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary

Washington, D.C.—The National Marine Sanctuary Foundation (NMSF) announced today that it has funded the first of several marine conservation and education projects designed to protect the fragile coral reefs and communities of the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS). This effort began this summer with the installation of permanent moorings in key areas of the sanctuary located 100 miles off the coast of Galveston, Texas in the Gulf of Mexico.

The FGBNMS is a no anchor zone, as designated through federal regulations, as well as through the International Maritime Organization (IMO). This should afford protection from anchoring. However, another important way to protect reefs and communities in the FGBNMS is to install and maintain moorings that allow boats less than 100 feet long, to tie up and access the sanctuary, further protecting the fragile habitat from the potential impacts of anchoring.

"Anchoring can cause tremendous damage to coral reef and marine habitats not only from the direct impact of the anchor, but also from dragging hundreds of feet of heavy chains along the ocean bottom," said G.P. Schmahl, sanctuary superintendent. "Moorings will allow access to the site by smaller vessels conducting allowed activities."

The National Marine Sanctuary Foundation (NMSF) funded this effort, using funds received from Rowan Companies, Inc. as part of a criminal plea agreement that included \$1 million designated to restore, protect, preserve, and improve the natural resources of the FGBNMS. Rowan Companies, Inc., an oil and gas drilling company, was charged in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Texas, for repeated violations of the Clean Water Act (CWA) related to the illegal discharge of pollutants from the company's Midland oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico.

"Criminal prosecutions of those who violate our environmental laws are an important part of protecting our country's priceless natural resources. It is an added success when, such as here, that prosecution can produce funds to further protect our nation's waters and the coral reefs and coral reef communities that depend on these waters," said Ronald J. Tenpas, Assistant Attorney General for the Justice Department's Environment and Natural Resources Division.

"We are pleased that the Foundation was selected to administer these funds and enable the marine conservation experts who manage the sanctuary to implement projects that

will protect one of America's underwater treasures," said Foundation President & CEO, Lori Arguelles.

Under sanctuary staff supervision, moorings were installed in late July by Spree Expeditions, LLC, which was contracted by the FGBNMS to install new U-bolt anchors for the attachment of mooring buoys at Stetson Bank, and East and West Flower Garden Banks.

The National Marine Sanctuary Foundation is the private, non-profit partner to the federal National Marine Sanctuary System, managed within NOAA's National Ocean Service. The 14 sites within the system protect special places in the oceans and Great Lakes, from the Florida Keys to the Hawaiian Islands, and from Lake Huron to the Gulf of Mexico. For more information and access to high resolution photos visit NMSFocean.org or flowergarden.noaa.gov.